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THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS.

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APRIL 10. JOSEPH EXALTED. Gen. XLI. 33-48.

APRIL 17. JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN. Gen. XLV. 1-15.

APRIL 24. JOSEPH AND HIS FATHER. Gen. XLVII. 1-12.

MAY 1. ISRAEL IN EGYPT. Exod. I. 6-14.

MAY 8. THE CHILD MOSES. Exod. II. 1-10.

The one common subject of these five lessons is Israel in Egypt. If the account of the descent of the Israelite people into Egypt, and their residence there, is to be regarded as historical, it must be understood consistently with itself, and with the other known facts in the case. This is a self-evident principle of interpretation, but one which is not in all particulars followed in our received traditional understanding of this part of the Bible. For fifteen centuries preceding the one in which we live, the interpretation of the Old Testament has descended to us through a succession of men who paid little attention to the geography of the countries where the events occurred, who were entirely without the helps which recent investigations have brought to light, and who were actuated by a disposition to make the Bible stories as wonderful as possible. Most of us received the stories, with this interpretation put upon them, when we were little children; we bring our imperfect childish conception of the matter into our present understanding of it. In the circumstances, none of us should be surprised if, on reviewing the evidence, we find that we have been accustomed to suppose that the Bible teaches some things which it clearly does not teach, concerning these events. These considerations are especially important just now, because many who deny the credibility of the facts stated in the Bible, really base their denials quite as much on what the Bible is commonly supposed to mean, as on what the Bible says.

In Gen. XLVI., Exod. I., VI., is a list of "all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt" (Gen. XLVI. 26). The question of the ages of these persons is of some importance in itself, and of more importance for the light it throws on other matters. Jacob was 130 years old when he came to Egypt, Gen. XLVII. 9. Joseph was then thirty-nine (Gen. XLI. 46, 53; XLV. 11). It follows that Jacob was ninety-one years old when Joseph was born, and ninety-seven years old when he returned to Canaan. If we suppose the interval between Jacob's service for his wives and that for his cattle, Gen. XXXI. 41, etc., to have been twenty years, Reuben, Joseph's oldest brother, may have been twenty-six years older than himself, that is, may have been about sixty-five years old at the descent to Egypt. Evidently, the older sons of Jacob were old enough to have children and grandchildren of their own. On the other hand, within the thirty-three years after Jacob's return, there had occurred the marriage of Judah, the births of the three sons of that marriage, the successive marriages and deaths of the two elder sons, then an interval of some years, and after that the births of Pharez and Zerah, Gen. XXXVIII. It follows that the latter must have been very little boys, at the time of the going down into Egypt, and that Hezron and Hamul, Gen. XLVI. 12,

were born some years later. Further, Benjamin was born after Jacob returned to Canaan, Gen. xxxv. 18. Hence his ten sons, Gen. xlvi. 21, if they were all born before the descent into Egypt, must have been young boys at that time, and probably from more mothers than one. Again, Joseph was twenty-eight years old at the time of the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker, Gen. xli. 46, 1. He had then been for a considerable time in prison, and had previously for a long time been Potiphar's overseer, Gen. xxxix. 5, 6, and had before that had time to make the reputation that led to his appointment. From these instances it appears that Jacob's sons and grandsons were old enough to marry, to have families, to do a man's work in the world, when they were not much more than twenty years of age. This confirms the position heretofore taken in these notes, that the extreme ages reached by the patriarchs indicate, not that human life then had a longer average than in subsequent times, but rather that the stock whence Israel sprang was apt occasionally to produce men of extraordinary vigor and length of life.

Were the seventy "souls," a few of them not yet born, with the addition of the wives of Jacob's sons, all the persons who came into Egypt with Jacob? This, I believe, is commonly asserted; but is it what the writer of the list intended us to understand? Are we to understand that among all Jacob's grandchildren there was but one girl? See Gen. xlvi. 17, 7. In view of the early marriages of Benjamin and Joseph and Er, are we to hold that, previous to the descent into Egypt, none of Jacob's sons possessed grandchildren? Further, who are Jacob's daughters, mentioned in Gen. xxxvii. 35; xlvi. 7, and in the latter place expressly distinguished from his sons' daughters? Further still, does this author mean that, when they went to Egypt, they abandoned their numerous servants and retainers?

When Abraham pursued the four kings, he could equip 318 men from among those of his home-born dependants who were available for a sudden emergency, Gen. xiv. 14. Several times afterward, the clan of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is represented as increasing, and never as diminishing, e. g., Gen. xxvi. 16, etc. It is represented that Jacob brought a large re-enforcement from Padan-aram, xxx. 43; xxxi. 16; xxxii. 10; xxxvi. 7, etc. Two only of his ten adult sons had a force sufficient for the capture of Shechem, xxxiv. 25. When the family came into Egypt, they came with their cattle and their goods, xlvi. 6. What became of their servants and retainers? Nothing is said concerning them; the traditional interpretation therefore concludes that the author of Genesis held that there were no servants or retainers of Jacob who came into Egypt—nobody at all except the sixty-seven persons who are named, and the wives of Jacob's sons. Is this a just conclusion?

When we speak of Jacob's sons buying corn in Egypt, I am afraid that the average picture in the minds of Christian people is that of just ten men, leading or riding just ten donkeys, buying so much corn as the ten donkeys could carry, and carrying home their purchase with them. I am afraid that I should be accused of caviling, if I should ask how long it would take the ten heavily loaded donkeys to go from the capital of Egypt to Beer-sheba, or how much corn would be left, after furnishing subsistence for the caravan by the way. If any of us have this idea of the matter, then certainly we need to modify it. Let us modify it not by conjecturally throwing in a few extra donkeys, but by looking at the facts. Unless the clans of Isaac and Jacob had unaccountably dwindled within

a few years, the purchase must have been of a grain-supply for some thousands of people. Egypt at that time possessed systems of transportation both by land and water. The grain business was a monopoly, conducted by Joseph for the king; but the grain was stored in cities in various parts of Egypt, *XLI. 48*. In the circumstances, we must think of the ten men riding their asses, their purchase-money with them, making the most respectable show they were able, going to the headquarters for grain-sales, where Joseph was, and transacting their business; the grain itself would naturally be delivered from the most convenient store-city, and by the most convenient transportation, to some place where Jacob's men would meet it with a caravan sufficient for transporting it home.

If we altogether understood the principles on which the genealogies found in the Bible are written, we should doubtless be able to explain just how the seventy "ancestral heads" mentioned in the list are to be distinguished from all other persons; that would carry with it the explanation of the fact that the writers of the Old and New Testaments habitually think of these seventy as properly constituting the Israel that went into Egypt. But if they thought of this fact as historical, they certainly did not understand it as conflicting with the other fact that seems to be so clearly implied in the narrative, namely, that Jacob took to Egypt the whole body of his servants and retainers. It seems to follow that these dependants, since they were mainly of the same race with himself, and were all included in the covenant of circumcision, became gradually blended, while in Egypt, with the blood-kindred of Jacob, so that all alike were reckoned Israelites. As Esau had already become the head and "father" of a strong people, made up largely of the kindred of his wives and their tribesmen, so each of the immediate descendants of Jacob became the ancestral head of a tribe, or a family, not made up exclusively of his lineal descendants, but including others who, for various reasons, came to be identified with that particular division of Israel.

The cases of Simeon, Judah and Joseph, *Gen. XLVI. 10, 12, 27*, and parallel passages, show that Canaanite or Egyptian blood might be admitted into the Israelite lines of descent. To what extent the Israel that went into Egypt may have there received additions through intermarriages with other peoples, or by adoptions from other peoples, no one is qualified to say; but the circumstances were such as afforded peculiar facilities for growth of this sort.

The duration of the sojourn is described in the Bible in the following forms: Exactly 430 years, *Exod. XII. 40, 41*; 430 years, "in Egypt and in the land of Canaan," *Sept. ibid.*; 430 years, beginning with the date when the covenant was made with Abraham, *Gal. III. 17*; 400 years, *Gen. xv. 13*, *Acts VII. 6*; the fourth generation, *Gen. xv. 16*. In the tribe of Levi, the names of Levi, Kohath, Amram, Aaron span the time of the sojourn; in some of the other tribes, the generations are more numerous. In the *Sunday School Times* of Jan. 29, 1887, Prof. W. H. Green says that, according to *1 Chron. VII. 23-27*, Joshua is tenth in descent from Jacob. Supposing this to be correct (the list in Chronicles is of uncertain interpretation), and supposing the sojourn in Egypt to have been the 215 years that the Septuagint and St. Paul make it to be, there is room for the entire succession, without supposing any father to have been less than 22 years old at the birth of his eldest son. Certainly all the biblical evidence fits this view of the case, and does not so well fit any other. There has been a disposition among interpreters to stretch the time as much as possible, in order to give time

enough for Israel to multiply to the 600,000 fighting men of the times of the Exodus; but what has been said above as to the number who went into Egypt, and the possibility of increase by absorption, shows that no stretching of this sort is necessary.

The tradition handed down through Syncellus is that the Pharaoh of Joseph was the last of the Shepherd Kings, the last king of the seventeenth dynasty. Between the accession of this king and that of Menephthah, who is commonly regarded as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, the numbers given in Rawlinson make it to have been a period of about 360 years, but with some gaps to be filled, and some doubtful passages to be adjusted. But it is hardly possible that this Pharaoh was one of the Shepherd Kings, Gen. XLVI. 34. A period of 215 years before the Exodus would begin somewhere in the middle years of the famous Thotmes III., perhaps just before he entered upon the expeditions in which he devastated Palestine and Syria. This cast of the dates seems to me much more likely than the other. So great a conqueror as Thotmes needed a man of Joseph's ability at home, to look after his affairs, and keep him from bankrupting his kingdom.

On any theory of the chronology, while Israel was safe and increasing in Egypt, Canaan, the land of their sojournings, was being crossed and recrossed by the armies that carried on the wars of the various Pharaohs. Rameses I., the founder of the nineteenth dynasty, reigned but one year, or a little more. He was succeeded by Seti, who reigned thirty years or more, but who, after twelve years, associated with himself his son, afterward the distinguished Rameses II., at that time a young boy. If common opinion is correct, the foster-mother of Moses was a daughter of either Rameses I. or of Seti. As Rameses II. reigned sixty-seven years, and Moses was eighty years old at some time during the early part of the reign of his successor, Moses and Rameses must have been nearly of an age; as boys, we may fancy that they played and studied together. The policy for oppressing the Israelites began pretty promptly upon the accession of this dynasty. Perhaps the flight of Moses from Egypt occurred not very long after Rameses II. became sole king. In view of these facts, if the Sunday-school publishers of the month do not make a somewhat conspicuous use of the hideous recently unrolled mummy of this Rameses, they will prove themselves unaccountably neglectful of their opportunities.

Josephus (*Ant.*, II., x, xi) tells some wonderful stories concerning the childhood and early manhood of Moses, which he did not obtain from the Scriptures. Probably they come from some work of the Jewish imagination, written in the centuries just before Christ; but the writer knew enough of Egyptian history, as we have now learned it from the monuments, to make some correct points, at least, in the setting in which he has placed his stories; there were Ethiopian wars, for example, at the time assigned to them by the story in Josephus.